6: Moser and Tayler E.N-5 (1960-1961) 1967 SQ19 Tucano SQ19

4

The Forest Addicts

141 The Tukano are small: a man rarely exceeds five foot six and the women are often no more than four foot ten inches. To see a cripple or deformed person is unusual. They are healthy and immensely strong. A man wears no more than his loincloth, today cut from a piece of trade cotton but formerly a strip of beaten barkcloth. Around his neck are three or four coils of minute white porcelain beads, which are among the most valued objects of exchange; a tight string of black berries is strung on *cumare* palm fibre above each elbow. The ears are often pierced with a short cane jutting out from the lobe; sometimes a feather is put into the cane, or a flower replaces the earplug. With their short, cropped hair and well-proportioned bodies they stand out as strong figures, beautifully adapted to the forests in which they live.

Their gait is jerky rather than slow and relaxed, indeed they almost run; whether the Indian is out hunting or carrying heavy loads he always moves in the same way. We could only look on amazed as our fifteen-gallon fuel drums were carried for two- or three-hour stretches with no apparent difficulty. They only showed any signs of wilting in strong sunlight; an Indian would rather travel by night than on an open river in the midday sun; his home is in the cool forest or under the dark eaves of the *maloca*. His face painted red with *karayuru*, a bow and a quiver of curare-tipped arrows in his hand, he has little sympathy for strangers and would rather remain undisturbed. It is therefore not surprising that the Indian's face tells you little. When he stares at you with his black eyes, it is as though you were peering into the cold unknown, and there is little warmth in his expression. We very seldom noticed any demonstration of affection among the older people. Husband and wife live together rather as a matter of arrangement than through love, and tenderness was only shown to the younger children. The old people, once unfit to go out hunting or to work in the plantation, may be neglected in times of shortage and even left to die. They are no longer of any use to the society, so it is best they go; for theirs is a harsh world where only the fittest can survive.

Although the Tukano seem outwardly reserved, lacking in affection and often proud, they are invariably very courteous. Their greetings are formal – just as we shake hands they always exchange a lengthy stream of words. It is